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Mother-in-law and Father-in-law Taboo

In former times the mother-in-law and father-in-law taboo was in full force. No man was allowed to talk directly to his mother-in-law or to look at her, and the same rule held with regard to the attitude of a woman toward her father-in-law. Even accidental meetings of these relatives, as on the road, were attended with great embarrassment. The author never learned of any way in which either the mother-in-law or the father-in-law taboo could be relaxed even temporarily, much less done away with entirely. 606

Puberty Customs

From the age of five, children, male and female, were taught the customs of their ancestors in a series of talks always delivered by an elderly male relative, perhaps the father. The specific training differed, of course, for boys and girls and for individuals. Personal training ceased at the age of puberty, when all, both boys and girls, were sent out to fast. For boys this fasting constituted the only puberty rite. After their faces had been blackened with charcoal they were sent to some neighboring hill with the injunction not to return till dawn. Gradually they would be sent out for two, then three, nights; if after that trial they were not blessed they would be advised either to desist entirely or exhorted to fast until they were blessed, no matter how long the time required to secure the desired result. While fasting the boys and girls used the following formula: 867 881 785 787

Waxop' inixjiwina	hina'djire na^{a}dje'je		·vahadjex.
Spirits	am I likely to be blessed?	that is why I am praying.	

[539 782]

One old Indian informed the author that in former times the young boys and girls were offered either bread or charcoal for their fast. If they took the charcoal, well and good; but if they took the bread, they were unceremoniously kicked out of the house and the charcoal was thrown after them. From the other statements of this informant one might gather that the young boys and girls generally took the bread, because, he said, after they had been kicked out, they would always resolve to go to the wilderness (in that way running the risk of being captured or killed by an enemy), in order to spite their parents. My informant was of the opinion that the parents purposely treated their children roughly, so that they might feel all the more miserable while fasting and thus pray all the more intensely.

A faster is always told to be careful as to what kind of spirits bless him, as he might be blessed by a bad spirit. Therefore a faster's blessings are always reviewed by the elders. J.'s old grandmother used to call the children in at dusk, as the evil spirits are around then. [776]

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881 785 787 All boys do not seem to have approached the ordeal of fasting with the proper religious feeling. One instance in particular showed anything but a reverent attitude; this is so amusing that it is here given in the exact words of the Indian:

When I was a young boy, my folks made me fast together with a boy named Hodudjeka. We were supposed to go to the hills and cry until the spirits blessed us. However, whenever we looked at each other and at our charcoal-blackened faces we could not refrain from bursting out laughing. Whenever we made up our minds to cry, something or other would induce us to look at each other and the laughing would begin all over again. When the time for our return to the house came, we didn't present the slightest indication of having cried, so we took some saliva and made long streaks on our faces.

Young girls and women are also encouraged to fast to obtain the war honors.

881 785 *Menstrual lodges.*—Fasting at puberty by girls was inseparably connected with their retirement to menstrual lodges. Sometimes there was only one girl in each menstrual lodge, sometimes there were as many as three. From the time of her first menstrual flow to her climacteric a woman retired to a menstrual lodge every month for 841 a few days. An excellent account of Winnebago customs in this respect was obtained in a text from a male informant, and, although somewhat discursive, it is given in full here:

As soon as a woman begins to have her menstrual flow she has to retire to a menstrual lodge and to be careful never to come in contact with any sacred objects. If she did, those objects would all lose their power. Everything that is holy would immediately lose its power if a menstruating woman came near it. A holy woman or a holy man or even a holy child would be affected by the proximity of a menstruating woman. Their holy condition would immediately disappear. In a similar way, if food were served to a sick person from the same dish used for a menstruating woman the sick person would become far more sick.

The food for a menstruating person is always cooked separately. Special dishes are used and special fireplaces are made.

If a person possessed any medicines, they would lose all their power if a menstruating woman came in contact with them. If any person should enter a menstrual lodge, in after life, whenever he fasted, he would not be blessed by any spirit. However, there is one thing that a menstruating woman is afraid of, and that is the [778] war bundle. These war bundles are kept in cedar [leaves?] mixed with medicine to prevent danger from just such a source. If a menstruating woman comes near a war bundle, her flow would increase and never cease and after a while she would die,[1] and only if the owner of the war bundle personally attends to her can she be cured. For that reason whenever a war-bundle feast is being given a woman is very careful, and even if it is a few days before her menstrual flow she will not go.

[1] This explains what puzzled the author for some time—namely, the fact that although contact with a menstruating woman destroyed the efficacy of everything holy, in the case of the war bundle the reverse was true and the woman was destroyed. Many of the Indians who spoke of this matter also seemed to believe it was the war bundle that killed the woman. From this account, however, it is perfectly clear that it is not the war bundle at all that killed the woman, but the poison to which the war bundle was wrapped. The war bundle is therefore no exception to the general rule, and it is only on account of the serious consequences that would accrue to so many people from any impairment of its powers, and the care taken to prevent this by surrounding it with special medicines, that it offers externally an exception to the fatal effects of contact with a menstruating woman.

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The menstrual lodge is never far from the lodge in which she lives. Indeed, it is within speaking distance, so that the occupants of her parents' lodge can hear her. All the utensils she uses are very small. The women stay from 4 to 10 days in the menstrual lodges. The older women stay out the shorter time because they are over it sooner. 841 343

It is said that if the young girls have any lovers they always come to the menstrual lodges at night. This is therefore the time for wooing. It is said that the girls cohabit with their lovers in these menstrual lodges. Those girls who have parents are attended by watchers, so that no unworthy men may visit them. They are especially guarded against ugly men, who are very likely to have love medicines. However, generally it is of no avail to struggle against such men, for they are invincible. [584 836] [832]

The women always take their blankets with them when they go to a menstrual lodge, for they never lie down but remain in a sitting posture, wrapped in their blankets. The women are always watched, so that when their menstrual flow comes everything is in readiness and lodge poles are placed around them and a lodge erected above their heads just about large enough to fit their body. They are not permitted to look upon the daylight nor upon any individual. If they were to look out during the day the weather would become very bad, and if they were to look at the blue sky it would become cloudy and rain. If they looked at anyone that person would become unfortunate. For four days they do not eat or drink anything; not even water do they drink. They fast all the time. Not even their own body do they touch with their hands. If they ever have any need of touching their bodies they use a stick. If they were to use their hands in touching their own body their bones would be attacked with fever. If they were to scratch their hands their heads would ache. After the fourth day they bathe in sight of their home. Then they return to their homes and eat. (This, of course, holds only for those whose menstrual flow ceases in four days.) If any women have to stay longer than four days they have to fast for that entire period. They always fast during this period and often some spirits bless them. When a woman who has stayed in the menstrual lodge for 10 days is ready to return to her lodge, she bathes herself and puts on an entirely new suit of clothes. Then her home is purified with red-cedar leaves and all the sacred bundles and medicines removed. Only then can she enter her parents' lodge. As soon as she returns to her parents' lodge after her first menstrual flow she is regarded as ready to be wooed and married. 841 [921] [831] 581

Thus the teacher of our customs, the Hare, has willed it. At a feast all the young girls nearing the age of puberty will be absent, but the old women, who have passed their climacteric, sit right next to the men, because they are considered the same as men as they have no menstrual flow any more. [325 886]

If the Winnebago can be said to be afraid of any one thing it may be said it is this—the menstrual flow of women—for even the spirits die of its effects.

If the above account may be taken as a fairly accurate description of the customs connected with the menstrual lodge as they existed in former times, then one point must be regarded as of great interest, namely, that the women permitted their lovers to meet them there. So far as is known to the author, among other tribes having menstrual lodges it would have been considered a crime for any man to come near them. According to our informant the women were indeed guarded while they were in the menstrual lodges, but not so much to protect them against the intrusion of all men, as against the intrusion of unworthy men. From other information obtained, how- 831 841 [925]

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867 My son, whenever people go on the warpath go along with them.
721 It is good to die on the warpath. You may perhaps say so, because you are unhappy that your wife has left you. My son, not for such reasons, however, must you go on the warpath. You will be merely throwing away a human life. If you want to go on the warpath, do so because you feel that you are courageous enough, not because you are unhappy at the loss of your wife. If you go on the warpath you will enjoy yourself. Do not go, however, unless you have fasted,
[785] and unless you have fasted for that particular warpath. If you have not fasted and attempt nevertheless to go on the warpath, a bullet will surely seek you out and kill you. This is what will happen to you if you do not fast.

[593 If you exert yourself in fasting you will assuredly perform some
[604 brave war exploit. You must tell your sisters and sister's children
605] and your mother's sisters all about your exploit. Remember, also, that the keepers of the war-bundles can give you good advice in all that pertains to war. For their deeds they will be given a good dish of meat.[a] This they will give you to eat.

Of such things did my ancestors speak, and I would wish you to do as they did. That is why I am telling you all these things. I myself never asked for any of this instruction, but my father did. All human beings ought to ask for it. Never let anybody be in a position to puzzle you in regard to what is right. Ask for this instruction, my son, for it is not an ordinary thing. In the olden
867 times if a person loved his child very much, he would only give him instruction after he had begun fasting all day for the first time. When a young boy has just matured, those who have been preaching
● [881] to him always ask him one question, namely, whether he had begun to fast. And this the young boy must always answer truthfully, for if he has begun his fast the instruction would stop. The old men do not preach to men, but only to boys.

881 (What follows is apparently an illustration of how a young man
887 asks his instructor for information of how to conduct himself in life.)
867 The young man will go to an old man and say, "Grandfather, I would like to know how I am to conduct myself in life. Bless me and if you can really give me any information, do so." Then the old man was very thankful and said, "It is good; you speak correctly." Now the one who was asking something of the old man had taken very good care of the old man's body and had led a good life. He had no scars of any kind; that is, he had never done anything shameful. The young man brought all sorts of food and placed it in the lodge of the old man. Then he also brought him a fine horse. Only then did he ask him again about the life that his ancestors had led, and what kind of a life he ought to live. He asked

[a] I. e., you will be given a position at the Winter Feast and offered some of the choice pieces of meat.

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him what the old people do when they give a child a name, and what they say. All these things the old man told him. "It is good," he said, "for you to know these things so that if anyone comes to you and asks you for information you will be able to tell them something and will not have to behave like a fool. If you are asked to give a little child a name, this little child will really be a means of increasing your power. That is why you ought to give a feast for it and smoke the child's tobacco. You must also give the child a name for his dog. Give him the name Yellow-Tree for a male dog. The name Yellow-Tree is given for the following reason. When the Thunderbirds strike at a tree it looks yellow. Just as leaves wither so do trees wither when the Thunderbirds strike them. They then begin to rot and become very much discolored. That is why they give a dog this name. If you ever have to give a dog-name for a female child call it She-Who-Stays-In-Her-Own-Place. This is all that I wish to tell you."

SYSTEM OF INSTRUCTION TO DAUGHTER

This is the way the old men used to speak to the little girls:

My daughter, as you go along the path of life, always listen to your parents. Do not permit your mother to work. Attend to your father's wants. All the work in the house belongs to you. Never be idle. Chop the wood, carry it home, look after the vegetables and gather them, and cook the food. When in the spring of the year you move back to your permanent settlements, plant your fields immediately. Never get lazy. Earthmaker created you for these tasks.

When you have your menses, do not ask those in your lodge to give you any food, but leave the lodge and fast and do not begin eating again until you return to your own lodge. Thus will you help yourself. If you always fast, when you marry, even if your husband had amounted to nothing before, he will become an excellent hunter. It will be on account of your fasting that he will have changed so much. You will never fail in anything and you will always be well and happy. If, on the contrary, you do not do as I tell you—that is, if you do not fast—when you marry he will become very weak, and this will be due to you. Finally he will get very sick.

My daughter, do not use medicine. If you marry a man and place medicine on his head he will become very weak and will not amount to anything. It may be that you do not want to have your husband leave you and this may induce you to use medicine to keep him. Do not do that, however, for it is not good. You will be ruining a man. It is the same as killing him. Do not do it, for it is forbidden. If you marry a man and you want to be certain of always retaining him, work for him. With work you will always

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Creator sits. The first thing that they did to me was this: They took me to a lodge at night; there they talked and sang. Then the second night the tobacco bundles were made; then the great old medicine men were given tobacco. After this came the four nights' preparation. Then came the great medicine dance. Then they went after those that were going to join, one at a time. They, the medicine men, were repeating what the Hare had done. When the Hare came on earth he performed certain actions, and that is what they were repeating now. Hare had visited the different spirits, it is said, looking for a means of life, it is said. The old medicine men possessed the good tidings that Hare had brought to this earth. That is what the people desired of Hare, it is said: 159 756

When they entered, the first person to whom tobacco had been given, i. e., the one first invited, entered first. Then the others followed in turn. Then he talked; then the one who initiated me expressed his thanks, saying, "You medicine men, this affair the Hare has given you, you are repeating in order to bless us. For that reason you have come. We ask you to give to this person whom we are about to initiate the life you have obtained for us. We ask that the newly initiated one travel along that road."

Then the first person spoke, and after that they all ate. When he was through they heated a stone. After that they all entered in regular order and I was asked to go in with them. Thus I entered the sweat-bath lodge. When I was inside they told me that the stone which they had heated was a spirit. "The life that he brought I should ask for," they told me. After that we went out again.

At night we entered again. Then at about 2 o'clock they took me out to the brush. Not until then was I to learn what the medicine men really did. When we got to the brush they made me sit down and the man who was initiating me turned me over to the others. He said, "I turn him over to you. Whatever the elders have taught you, that we desire you to tell him." When he finished the first one began to talk, saying, "It is good that you are such a person. Earthmaker must have willed it so. In the olden times if a person wanted to join the medicine lodge he could not do it until he was quite old." Then he continued preaching to me. When Earthmaker first came into the world and what happened after that, how he created all things: that he told me. He told me that Earthmaker created four worlds, in each of which he placed men and women; that the heavens we see represent the last man he created and the earth we are living on the last woman he created. Then he told how *Herecgunina* was created. The story is as follows: Earthmaker created man, whom he wished to put at the head of the world, but he did not make one of his legs quite right. Then he threw him down to the earth because when Earthmaker made anything wrong 159 756 881 868 [773]

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159 he never did it over again. *Herreguninа* lived on earth from that
756 time on, and it is said that he also created things. Indeed, it is said
881 that he was almost the equal of the Earthmaker. He made the people
868 very miserable. Then Earthmaker sent four of his sons (to save the
773 people). Hare alone, of all the four, accomplished what he had been sent out for. All the rest failed. Hare obtained life for the people upon this earth.

Then the man told how the medicine lodge had been founded; how all the spirits upon the earth and all those under the earth and all those above the earth gathered together. They brought life with them. Then the medicine bags began to come. First came the eagle. He came from above. Next came the hawk, and then the squirrel, etc. The otter was the last one. Then the old man stopped talking to me and another person began to admonish me. He told me how I was to conduct myself. Then he spoke to me of the medicine-lodge road (i. e., of life) and what happens after life.

159 The first thing that I would meet on the road would be bad birds
756 making a lot of noise. "Do not look at them," he told me. They
868 would let fly at me bad-smelling saliva and phlegm, but I was not
775 to turn around, he said. Then the road would become thickly covered with thorn bushes. It would seem almost impossible to untangle them. I was, however, not to pay any attention to them, he told me. On the road, fires would send their sparks toward me, but I was to pay no attention to them. After a while I would lose one of my relatives, but I was to keep right on. I was not to get angry nor to give up, and after a while the road would become thickly covered with poplars growing on each side. Then the hair on my temples would become gray. This is what would happen to me, he told me, if I paid close attention to this ceremony. After a while it would become foggy i. e., my eyesight would grow dim. Then I would come to a hill, one of four hills. When I came to the last hill there I would see red cedar trees. This is what would happen to me if I paid close attention to this ceremony, he told me. My soul would return to Earthmaker and I would then be allowed to come back to this earth if I wanted to.

159 Then they gave me the object with which they shot themselves
756 the shell. They shot me. After that they made me try to do it,
796 and when I was able to shoot well, we all came back. It was now
881 daylight. Now they put clothes on themselves and arose. Those who were initiating me then spread upon the ground the things which had been brought. Then the leader spoke. He told me that he would put me on the medicine-dance road. Then they sat me down there and shot me. Then the clothes that I had on were taken off and I was given other clothes. I was now told that I was standing on the medicine-dance road. After that they danced all day. In the evening they stopped. Now this is what I did; this is all I can say. I greet you, my friends.